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ABSTRACT

In the last 20 years, the incidence of home schooling in the United States has increased dramatically. This review examines the history of home schooling, the demographic characteristics of students schooled at home, and the reasons parents select this type of education. Findings suggest that parents who home school their children tend to have 2 to 3 more years of education than the general population and may have more children. Reasons for home schooling have typically been ideological (religious or philosophical) or pedagogical (social or academic). The majority of home schooled families study a wide range of conventional subjects and emphasize reading, mathematics, and the sciences. The relationship between home schooling families and the public school and government officials is presented as changing from one of contention and confrontation to one of cooperation. Examples of cooperation include a combination of home school and school study and the provision of support to home schooling families by public schools. Research on outcomes of home schooling has concentrated on the child's academic achievement, creativity, and self-esteem. Most research indicates that home schooled children perform at higher academic levels than non-home schooled children. However, many of the existing studies have methodological problems. (Contains 30 references.) (Author/KB)

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Homeschooling in the United States

A Review of Recent Literature

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Abstract

In the last twenty years the incidence of homeschooling in the United States has increased dramatically. This review of the literature looks at the history and development of homeschooling, the demographics of homeschoolers, and the reasons why parents choose to engage in this kind of education for their children. The two main reasons for homeschooling are ideological, having to do with beliefs and values, and pedagogical, having to do with social and academic environments. Many homeschoolers tend to fall at the extremes of society represented by fundamentalist Christian families at one end and New Age families at the other. Homeschools themselves are looked at from the point of view of content and method. The history of homeschooling includes the development of the changing relationships between homeschools and publics schools, from contention to cooperation. The results of homeschooling in the existing research is mainly focused on academic achievement measured by standard tests. But there have also been some interesting studies on creative thinking, self-concept, and other constructs of personality. A list of 30 references is included.

Homeschooling in the United States

A Review of Recent Literature

Introduction

The effects of industrialization and modernization, including such "new" institutions as public education, have been seen by many families who choose to homeschool as an imposition on the American family, competing with it in the provision of educational, moral, and social guidance. (Mayberry and Knowles, 1989). Parents have homeschooled their children since the beginning of time, in all cultures and at all levels of society. Public schools as we know them today are largely a product of the 19th century. The need for bringing together the diverse cultures of immigrants in the United States, into one macro culture, is thought to be the primary reason for the emergence of public schools. Secondly, Public schools were thought to counteract undesirable characteristics of the lower classes, and to raise the level of the majority of families through education (Knowles, 1989). Homeschooling is thought to be a force against these goals and state governments are interested in finding out if the methods of education which these families are using meet the needs of a democratic society (Ray, 1988).

Studies of homeschooling have focused on two areas. The first is the demographics and characteristics of families who choose to homeschool. The second is the results of homeschooling, both academically and, more recently, the affective, or emotional and social results of this experience. The majority of research is done on the first area, and on the academic results. Only recently have researchers begun to focus on emotional and social issues such as self-concept and peer interaction.

According to Frost and Morris (1988) homeschooling is one of the fastest growing segments of American education and ranges from 60,000 to one million according to 1988 figures. Patricia Lines, in a working paper of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in Washington DC (1991) placed the figure at between 248,500 and 304,000 for 1991, or 1% of the

population. Salt Lake City alone, with a population of one million had 3,000 to 5,000 students by the end of the eighties (Knowles, 1989). Others think that this is a very conservative count. It is difficult to tell since many families are homeschooling "underground" and do not show up on a count.

The list of famous people who have been homeschooled inspires many to attempt it. It includes Charles Dickens, John Stuart Mill, Mozart, Blaise Pascal, and others (Schmidt, 1989). Whatever the concerns and criticisms, more and more colleges and universities are seeking out homeschooled young people over those who merely excel at taking tests. A list of colleges who have accepted homeschoolers into their undergraduate programs is available on the internet (Endsley, 1994). It includes, among almost 100 others, Amherst College, Brown University, Dartmouth College, General Motors Institute School of Engineering, George Mason University, Harvard University, Oxford University (UK), UC Berkeley, UCLA, and Yale University.

The Demographics of Homeschooling Families and Why They Choose to Homeschool

The kinds of families who choose to homeschool is extremely varied. Ray (1989), in trying to pinpoint the characteristics came up with some statistics which describe the "average" homeschooling family in the US in 1989. He presented a profile of homeschooling families which was based on several studies. He said that in the majority of cases both parents are involved in the homeschooling, with the mother doing most of the teaching. The parents have attended college and they attend regular church services. The average total household income is $25,000 a year, and there are three children in the family.

According to many studies there are homeschoolers who are Black, White, and Oriental; low, middle, and high-income; parents with Ph.D.'s, and parents with no degrees; conservatives and liberals; families with 1, 5, & 10 children. When compared with the general United States population they tend to have two to three more years of education and probably have more

children. The literature suggests that in other respects they are no different than most Americans statistically. However they do share the common belief that it is the responsibility and the right of parents to educate their children. Also they are willing to take a socially unorthodox route to rearing the kind of children they want (Ray, 1989).

As far as the reasons that parents choose to homeschool, Mayberry and Knowles (1989) categorized them into four major areas. They are (1) religious, (2) socio-relational, (3) academic, and (4) New Age. Mayberry (1989) defines New Age parents as those who "believe education should consider all interrelated aspects of the human experience--emotional, spiritual, intuitive, creative, aesthetic, and rational, and should facilitate the unfolding of the soul."

From a review of the literature available to date, it is clear that these and other reasons can easily be categorized into the following two groups: Ideological Reasons which are religious and philosophical, and Pedagogical Reasons, which are social and academic.

Ideological Reasons

In several studies research pointed to religion or philosophy as the main reasons for homeschooling. Many of these parents are opposed to the curriculum of public schools on these grounds, and they see the education of children as a parental right rather than a state right. Among ideologically oriented homeschoolers there is no consensus as to which reason is the most prevalent. Researchers report different major reason in different studies. Gustavsen carried out one of the earliest and broadest studies of this kind in the late 70's and published his findings in 1981. Because of the constricts of time this study could not be accessed and is discussed by a secondary source. It contains a wealth of information on homeschoolers and suggests that the main reason why parents homeschool is ideological. That is, they want a closer parent-relationship, and they are concerned with moral health and character development.

There are , however, differences of opinions as to the definition of just what constitutes moral health and character development. Homeschooling families vary from being rigidly traditional and law abiding to practitioners of civil disobedience. Their religious and philosophical

beliefs are varied. Some remove their children from school because they see the public schools as too secular, and others because they see them as too religious (Ray, 1988). Much research seems to point to the liberal and conservative extremes of society as forming the bulk of homeschooling families. They have been described as "rabid fundamentalists up in the mountains, or leftovers from the '60's, with kids contemplating their navels." (Thomas, 1994). The disillusionment with public schools and a social period of moral decay is a common thread with both the New Age and Religious homeschoolers. Even though their other concerns represent completely different world views and value systems, they do have in common a discontent with modern culture (Mayberry, 1989). Concern for their children's ethical, moral, and spiritual development runs deep in parents reasons to homeschool (Van Galen, 1988).

Christian homeschoolers believe that the basic curriculum of public school has been replaced by the teaching of evolution, sex education, and values clarification exercises (Van Galen, 1987). They are thought, by many researchers, to form the majority of families in most homeschool surveys. However, the unbiased underlying attitudes of some research leads one to doubt the validity of their findings. For example, one study, in trying to discover the reasons for homeschooling, sent out a questionnaire listing 33 possible choices for people to select. Five of the first seven choices given were: (1) To teach my children about God and the Bible, (2) Religious reasons, (3) Did so under the leading of the Holy Spirit, (4) Decided to after praying about it, (5) In obedience to God's Word (Deuteronomy). The study was done in Chattanooga, Tennessee. 300 questionnaires were sent out and 100 responses were chosen for the research. The research was based on Luke 2:52 of the Bible which states "And Jesus increases in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Howell, 1989).

At the other extreme of society are the New Agers who, as Mayberry (1989) describes, "perceives contemporary political parties, their platforms, and social institutions incapable of ushering in a new social order based upon decentralized organization whose policies are in balance with nature." They see homeschooling as a step in the process of solving the problems of society.

One research study of the demographics of homeschoolers found that New Agers or non-fundamentalist Christians represent 66% of the total number of homeschoolers in the country, and fundamentalist Christians as 5.9% (Williams, 1991). It used as its subjects a nation-wide list of families who used the Oak Meadow home-study school curriculum. Although the author considers this a representative survey, it failed to take into consideration the fact that this particular curriculum, based on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf schools, does not appeal to fundamentalists. Therefore this fact would skew the results. In most studies the number of Christian homeschoolers is higher than the non-Christian group.

The ideological proponents of homeschooling are not beyond criticism of research. Ray (1988) tells us that ideologues sometimes focus so strongly on trying to ensure a certain set of values, that they sometimes isolate their children from intellectually stimulating and challenging experiences in order to more successfully pass on their own ideals.

Pedagogical Reasons

Social and academic reasons account for the other rationale for parents to homeschool their children. Van Galen (1986) suggests that parents who choose to home school for pedagogical reasons are concerned with their social as well as academic environments. John Holt (1989) addresses these basic concerns of parents when he recommends an environment where children are exposed to the everyday life of real people. He says that children need to have models for good work, building, baking, drawing, writing, gardening, and so forth. The only way a child can see the effort involved in completing a task such as building a table is to see someone building a table. In order for children to learn to take time, to concentrate, use effort and skill, is to see these things in the world. This is very different from the traditional academic view of education.

Aside from these more social and practical learning considerations there are concerns of a purely traditionally academic nature. Frost and Morris (1988) tell us that the whole basis for the homeschooling movement is dissatisfaction with public schools, and the parents feeling powerless in the face of a chaotic system, drug use and poor standards. Ray (1988) says that

the average homeschooling family has chosen this method of education so that their children will accomplish more academically, and also to avoid peer pressure and to enhance self concepts.

The desire to strengthen family and to restore or maintain family unity was the strong social reason for homeschooling according to many research studies. These parents expressed a desire to be present during all stages of the development of their children. They did not express a strong criticism of schools, but focused instead on positive reasons for homeschooling such as one-on-one learning, high academic standards, and what they considered a healthy and more positive social environment (Mayberry & Knowles, 1989)

With both the ideologically and pedagogically oriented families, there are internal concerns. Even though most of the research points to the positive aspects of homeschooling, Williams, Arnoldson, and Reynolds (1984), identified several areas of concern for parents, especially those new to homeschooling. These are fear and self-doubt, social isolation, exhaustion of the parent, striking a balance between being a teacher and being a parent, and between teaching with structure and with spontaneity, measuring progress, clarifying spouse roles, dealing with undesirable child behaviors, teaching independence, deciding what materials to use, and children's socialization.

Homeschools - Content and Method

Content

There are almost as many belief systems about content as there are homeschoolers. There are people who begin at a very early age to teach academic skills, those who believe in following the child's interests and beginning when they are ready, be it 3 or 10 years of age, and others who think that children are not ready for academic learning until ages 8 to 12 (Ray, 1988).

Christian homeschoolers usually teach a more traditional curriculum and many include biblical training and the teaching of religious history (Mayberry, 1989). Many Christian homeschoolers take much of their curriculum from the Bible, based on the belief that "The Bible is

the inspired and infallible Word of God...is without error in whole and part, including theological concepts as well as geographical and historical details." (Webb, 1994). New Age homeschoolers believe that education should consider all aspects of the human experience--rational, but also emotional, intuitive, spiritual, aesthetic, and creative (Mayberry, 1989).

There is a continuum between using rigid curricula and open ended curricula, but Ray (1988) tells us that, based on many research studies, it has been found that the majority of families study a wide range of conventional studies and emphasize reading, math and the sciences. Van Galen makes an interesting point about the "hidden curriculum" to which children are exposed as their families take a stand to be different from other families who support public schools, and when they face opposition from family members, friends and officials (1988).

Method

Most research confirms the idea that homeschools, as compared to public schools, produce superior academic results. The small adult-student ratio is thought to be an important variable, but so is the factor of materials used. It is thought that the high quality of homeschool programs is due to the fact that most homeschoolers use supplementary materials in their programs ((Litcher & Schmidt, 1991). Some homeschoolers used homemade materials and others spend hundreds of dollars a year on commercial curriculum materials (Ray, 1988). Money magazine (Cook, 1991) says that the national average that homeschoolers spend on education is $500 a year per child.

There is no consensus about how much time is spent in actually homeschooling because the definition of "schooling" is so broad. For some this means time spent at workbooks and sitting at desks. For others it means trips, reading for pleasure, cooking, gardening, and so forth. According to one study the average homeschooled child spends three to four hours a day being "schooled" and extra time on special projects (Ray, 1988). Some homeschool correspondence courses expect parents to make sure that their children spend several hours each day filling in workbook pages (Williams, 1991). Many of these homeschoolers reject public school but recreate them in their homes. Structuring the day around textbooks and other formal learning materials

shows that the parents still depend on the ideological foundations of formal education. Children in this environment are expected to be passive and uncritical consumers of "education" (Van Galen, 1988). On the other hand, some parents go to great lengths to take the traditional subjects and transform them into projects. They encourage children to analyze, to criticize, and to create, rather than to merely memorize. These children have more autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and an unstructured format, focusing on learning as a process rather than a rigidly determined goal (Williams, 1991). There are also families who choose to fill the house with interesting materials, and to require nothing but play, trusting that the children will learn. Parents are free to experiment in ways that would not be possible in public school settings (Van Galen, 1988). John Holt (1989) encourages homeschooling parents to withhold uninvited help, to learn to stop criticizing, and to realize that children are learning all the time. Learning comes about, he believes, not just from what adults teach, but from whatever is going on in the environment.

One concern of educational researchers today is the effect of television on children. Some think that being home all day will result in even more exposure to television . However, in studying the schedules of homeschoolers, Groover and Endsley (1988) found that homeschooling parents were far more restrictive than other parents in the area of television-viewing. In a study of 70 homeschooling parents and 20 non-homeschooling parents it was found that the homeschooled children watched an average of 3-5 hours a week and the non-homeschooled children 11-12 hours a week. In fact this study showed that 29% of the homeschoolers did not even own a television set and all of the non-homeschooled children did.

The Relationships between Homeschools and Public Schools

The increase in the numbers of homeschoolers over the last twenty years is thought to be a reflection of economic, political and cultural developments during this time (Knowles, 1989). The relationship between homeschooling families and schools, or government officials, can be categorized into two phases, (1) contention and confrontation, and (2) cooperation.

Contention and Confrontation

The response of school boards to homeschooling has been varied. In Alabama, for example, a homeschooling parent must be certified to teach (Ray & Rakestraw, 1988). In many instances this has forced homeschoolers to go underground and sometimes even to move to a more sympathetic state. School boards have opposed homeschooling for academic, social, and financial reasons, but issues raised in the courts reached a peak by the end of the 1970's and then began to taper off (Knowles, 1989).

Some critics think of homeschooled children as a stereotype of the shy, passive, lethargic, isolated child. A judge in West Virginia described Homeschools as places where parents "keep their children in medieval ignorance and quarter them in Dicksonian squalor beyond the reach of the ameliorating influence of social welfare agencies in an environment of indoctrination and deprivation so that the children become mindless automatons incapable of coping with life outside their own families [state versus Riddle]" (Stough, 1992). Homeschoolers were viewed, and are still viewed, as subversive and critical of society at large (Knowles, 1989).

Generally undeterred by criticisms of this sort, and even strong contention with public schools, the homeschooling movement has grown very rapidly in the last thirty years. Criticism has been aimed at schools as well as at homeschools. New Age homeschoolers, emphasizing a curriculum of "international consciousness of a global community", have criticized public schools for not teaching this (Mayberry (1989). Christian homeschoolers, on the other hand, criticize schools for not teaching Christian values, and for teaching such subjects as evolution and sex education. In the 1960's educational reformers such as John Holt, Ivan Illich, Jonathan Kozol, and Herbert Kohl fueled dissatisfaction with the public schools, encouraging many families to begin alternative schools or to take their children out of school altogether. The 1983 publishing of *A Nation at Risk*, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education revived the concern over the effectiveness of the public school system in general, and encouraged many families to withdraw their children from school and to homeschool.

Cooperation

Despite the contention, there are many examples of cooperation between schools and homeschoolers today. This has been forced upon many schools because homeschooling families have joined forces, networked, hired legal aid, and gained instructional assistance. Some are now homeschooling in cooperation with schools, and still feeling in control of their family's destiny (Knowles, 1989). One type of homeschooling situation that is becoming more popular is the homeschool coop. Marek (1989) carried out a study of a situation where homeschool and school study were integrated. The classes met for two days a week for 2 1/2 hours. The children studied math and science at school and everything else at home. Another example is Valley Brook public school in Silver Spring Maryland. The school offers support to homeschool families and a menu of subjects that students can choose to take at the school (USA Today, 1995). Research shows that families who have been homeschooling for a number of years, that is over eight years or so, prefer to cooperate with other homeschoolers. However, families new to homeschooling are more interested in cooperating with public schools. It is thought that this is because the public schools have become more willing to cooperate in recent years (Knowles, 1989).

Today public school educators are beginning to see that the study of the phenomenon of homeschooling can be of great value to the general public. Van Galen says that homeschooling provides an environment on the "cutting edge" of education. The homeschool is an arena of educational research where the issues facing everyone in education are being dealt with (Knowles, 1989). The findings of homeschooling researchers will give us information on the effects of peer pressure, child-directed schooling, tutorial learning, and less structured learning models where adults and children share the learning responsibility (Wartes, 1988). John Holt, in 1983, described the benefit of homeschooling as "a laboratory for the intensive and long-range study of children's learning and of the ways in which friendly and concerned adults can help them learn. It is a research project, done at no cost, of a kind for which neither the public schools nor the government could afford to pay" (Ray, 1989).

Results of Homeschooling

We are urged to be cautious in our emphasis on test scores in determining the results of homeschooling. "High test scores, which may arise from less creative learning environments, do not necessarily indicate the existence of the finest quality in teaching/learning practices, whether at home or in conventional schools." (Ray, 1988) The results of homeschooling which have been researched at this point fall mainly into the following classifications:

Academic Results

It has long been known that parental involvement in a child's education has a positive effect on learning. A study done in 1979 found that children ask many more questions in a learning environment at home than at school, and that they learn very quickly that in school their role is to answer questions, not to ask them. It was found that mothers use more complex language at home than teachers do in school, and the conclusion was that children's language needs can be better met at home than in school. (Ray, 1988). There have many other studies connected with public schools which show the positive result of parents working with their children at home.

Montgomery (1989) found that the principle of the self-fulfilling prophecy has a lot to do with the success of homeschoolers. Parents who homeschool tend to see their children as above average, and that they expect them to achieve, both socially and academically. As a result, these children usually fulfill these expectations because of their supportive environment.

A study comparing the standard test scores of homeschooled children with public schooled children was initiated and carried out by the Alaska Department of Education in 1981 (Frost & Morris, 1988). Due to the fact that many children in Alaska live too far away from public schools to attend classes, a centralized correspondence course of study has been available to them since 1939. One advantage of this study over others is that all children, classroom-schooled and homeschooled, were tested. In most homeschool research studies the homeschooled subjects are self-selected. The results showed that the homeschooled children, by fourth and fifth grade, tested higher than their classroom counterparts on all subjects.

The authors of the Alaska study criticize their research because of the fact that parents, rather than teachers, administered the homeschooled tests. They tell us to look at research which was completed in 1985-6 involving 74 children in five counties in Illinois. Two independent researchers were selected to do the in-home testing. The test was the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, administered in two half-day sessions to children who would be in grades three through six in public school. The results from grade three through six were 74%, 74%, 72%, and 70% comparable (%) to national norm of public school children taking the same test at the same grade level. A longitudinal study of a large group of students in Washington found that 426 home school students consistently scored above average on the SAT's (Ray, 1988).

If there is a weakness in the academic achievement of homeschoolers it is in the area of math. (Frost & Morris, 1988). They have high scores in math concepts and math (story) problems, but math computation scores are lower. This is explained by the theory that says these computation skills are taught by rote drilling in schools and most homeschooling parents are against this method of instruction. These scores are not a major concern, since the understanding of math concepts, and the ability to use math in real life, are thought to be more important than rote memorization and speed.

Non Academic Results

Three of the four homeschooled sons of the Colfax family in California have entered and succeeded at Harvard University. The acceptance of the first son, who had never taken a test until applying to universities, brought a lot of media attention to homeschooling. The parents have focused more on creativity than academic achievement. They believe that "if only by virtue of the freedom it affords, homeschooling promotes creativity. It is an almost inevitable consequence of a program in which self-directed boys and girls are encouraged - and even given space - to devise their own programs, to explore, and to experiment at their own pace." (Colfax and Colfax, 1988, p.48).

A study of a nation-wide sample of homeschooling families using the, parent-administered, Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, showed that the homeschooled children were more creative than their peers. However it was also found that the parents of these children were slightly older and better educated than the average, suggesting that it might be due to these extraneous variables that the scores were high (Williams, 1991).

In Ray's 1986 study, he refers to research on socialization of Homeschoolers. The results of a test using the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale showed that homeschooled children from grades 4 through 12 scored significantly higher than their public-schooled peers. Another test, Roberts Apperception Test for Children (which measures the construct of personality), found homeschooled children consistently "well-adjusted" and less peer dependent than their counterparts in private schools. Being less "peer-dependent" is seen as a positive trait by homeschooling parents. Peer-dependency can bring about a loss of self worth, optimism, respect for parents, and even trust in peers. Such children learn to be comfortable only with children of their own age and develop a negative "me-first" kind of sociability (Chatham-Carpenter, 1992).

Summary and Conclusion

The phenomenon of homeschooling is a very interesting stage in the history of America. In Japan and several other countries, it is against the law. But here in the United States it is a strong social, political, and religious statement, protected by the Constitution. As a result of reviewing the literature, we believe that the homeschooling movement will benefit society as a whole. Among the positive results are (1) the strengthening of the family, (2) the clarification of values and goals of parents as they decide what to pass on to the children, (3) families and groups of homeschoolers learning to work together, and (4) the contact, exploration, and problem solving of various other groups working together, for example schools with families and New Agers with fundamentalist Christians.

Research on Homeschooling is in its infancy. Many samples are small and done mainly by proponents of homeschooling. In all but the Alaska study the subjects were self-selected. Almost all of the areas which have been researched are quantitatively testable in some way. Children test high, but the parents are doing the testing in most instances, and one wonders what would be the results if variables could be better controlled. What is needed in homeschooling research is more longitudinal studies, with the results being reported often. A problem with the frequent reporting of results might be the invasion of privacy which may affect the children involved. This would have to be dealt with in a sensitive manner. Other qualitative analysis of all kinds would be valuable, both to educational researchers and to those interviewed, giving homeschooling families an opportunity to clarify goals and to express themselves. We believe, along with several researchers cited in this review, that the information gained through the "experiments" of individual homeschools will, in the end, benefit all areas of education.

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